

## **URBANISATION AND SECURITY: POLICY BRIEF**

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There exists no consistent or meaningful relationship between urbanization and security. For starters, the terms urbanization and security embrace so many cross-cutting ideas and processes, that researchers have found few consistent correlation between the numerous dimensions. Second, insofar as one can find a close correlation, independent variable usually account for the statistical relationship. Even when there is a direct correlation the direction of causation is obscure. Finally, the many internal variations in every country and every city make most generalizations across nations or regions meaningless.

The lack of clear linkages between urbanisation and most dimensions of security is true at most scales of analysis, across most countries and over time. Even when correlations can be found they explain little. This key point can be illustrated by a trite example. Personal security is higher in the most urbanised countries than in the least urbanised countries. It is safer, in terms of most social and economic variables, to live in Britain, Japan or Switzerland than to live in most parts of Africa or India. People live much longer, eat better, and are more literate in urbanised countries than in less urbanised countries. But, what does this correlation prove? It proves absolutely nothing about the link between urbanisation and security because it fails to explain how the links between urbanisation and variables like life expectancy, nutrition and literacy actually operate. Undoubtedly, urbanisation often contributes, and sometimes detracts from, the quality of people's lives, but who can tell by how much?

In order to understand the link between urbanisation and different forms of security different questions need to be asked. Why do some cities have more people living in poverty than others with similar levels of per capita income? Why is crime and violence particularly high in one city and very low in another? Why are living conditions for the majority so much better in some cities than in others? Broadly comparing similar cities, why do some do well and some do badly on a particular indicator of welfare and security?

Perhaps most critical of all is to examine why, despite our hugely impressive economic and technological progress over the last century, we have not done a better job in removing poverty. Why are so many urban people living so poorly and why is inequality increasing rather than decreasing? Unfortunately, urbanization does not answer these questions. Sending the proletariat back to the countryside or bringing the peasants to the city is not going to significantly reduce poverty or inequality.

Despite these inconsistencies, the role of cities cannot be ignored. While urbanisation may not produce poverty, crime and political protest either automatically or inevitably, poorly managed urbanisation can stimulate undesirable forms of social development. What is needed across the globe, and particularly in the poorer parts of the world, are sensible urban policies backed by adequate resources. Providing that the shanty towns receive electricity and water, the poor have the opportunity to work and a transportation system to get them there, and urban wealth is not

distributed so unequally that the system appears wholly inequitable, then cities will continue their historical role of helping to improve the human condition.

What will make a difference is the introduction of policies that give people hope for a better future, assuring them that their children will lead better lives than they have. Satisfying that criterion requires that they have access to work, services and transport. It requires that their lives are seldom disrupted by extreme events; preventing human-induced disasters, ensuring that the economic situation does not fluctuate violently, guaranteeing that governments are not constantly changing and making sure that prices are under control. Ensuring security by this criterion also requires fairness, not in the sense of total equality, but in giving everyone some kind of life chance and removing any perception that everything is loaded against the disadvantaged. In turn, this means that crime must be under control, that there is a relatively efficient and honest police force, that blatant forms of social discrimination are reduced, and that people with genuine complaints have someone in power to whom they can appeal with some expectation that something will be done. Unfortunately few cities in the world satisfy most of these conditions. Nevertheless, in a rapidly urbanising world, it is only by satisfying those conditions that we will continue to progress. Otherwise, what has in the past been predominantly a process of sustained, harmonious and secure urban development, will not remain so in the future.